

## Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 147783

E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS: SHUM, SL

SUBJECT:HUMAN RIGHTS: COUNTRY ACTION PLAN FOR SIERRA LEONE

REF: STATE 139160

1. THE GEOGRAPHIC BUREAUS HAVE BEEN TASKED TO PREPARE HUMAN RIGHTS EVALUATION REPORTS INCLUDING AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT CONDITION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN EACH COUNTRY AND THE PROPOSED OBJECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THOSE CONDITIONS.

2. THIS CABLE TRANSMITS THE DESK'S DRAFT REPORT FOR YOUR COMMENTS. YOUR RESPONSE IS REQUESTED BY JUNE 30 SO THAT THE BUREAU CAN MEET THE SUBMISSION DATE OF JULY 1. THE AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE HAS REVIEWED THIS REPORT IN DRAFT. SLUG FOR AF DISTRIBUTION ONLY.

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3. THE INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THE COUNTRY EVALUATION WILL BE CLASSIFIED IN ACCORDANCE WITH EXECUTIVE ORDER 11652. REPORTS WILL BE USED AS SOURCE MATERIAL FOR THE PREPARATION OF ANNUAL HUMAN RIGHTS REPORTS ON ALL COUNTRIES WHICH ARE RECIPIENTS OF US SECURITY ASSISTANCE, AND WILL BE SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT'S HUMAN RIGHTS COORDINATING COMMITTEE, CHAIRED BY THE DEPUTY SECRETARY.

#### 4.A. CONDITION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN SIERRA LEONE

(1) SIERRA LEONE'S RECORD FOR RESPECT OF THE INTEGRITY OF THE PERSON IS SOMEWHAT SPOTTY. THE COUNTRY'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP HAS MANIPULATED ITS INSTITUTIONS FOR PERSONAL POLITICAL ENDS. WHILE IT IS NOT CLEAR THAT THERE ARE POLITICAL PRISONERS, ISOLATED REPORTS STILL PERSIST. DURING THE PERIOD LEADING UP TO ELECTIONS HELD MAY 6, ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS DID TAKE PLACE. THE JUDICIARY REMAINS RELATIVELY INDEPENDENT, AND SIERRA LEONE'S COURTS HAVE A GOOD REPUTATION FOR FAIR TRIAL BY DUE PROCESS. THE DEPARTMENT HAS NO INFORMATION ON THE USE OF TORTURE OR OF CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING PUNISHMENTS. SIMILARLY THERE IS NO INFORMATION ON VIOLATIONS OF THE SANCTITY OF THE HOME.

(2) THE CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEE OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION IS OBSERVED, AND THERE ARE NO OFFICIAL RESTRICTIONS ON TRAVEL WITHIN THE COUNTRY. REGULATIONS GOVERNING FOREIGN TRAVEL ARE NOT ONEROUS, AND SIERRA LEONE PERMITS EMIGRATION WITH A MINIMUM OF LEGAL RESTRICTIONS.

FREEDOMS OF ASSEMBLY AND THOUGHT, HOWEVER, CAN AND HAVE BEEN INFRINGED UPON, PARTICULARLY DURING THE RECENT ELECTIONS. CHARGES OF HARRASSMENT AND INTIMIDATION  
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WERE COMMONPLACE, AND IT IS ACCEPTED PRACTICE THAT POLITICIANS HIRE GROUPS OF THUGS OR EVEN PRIVATE ARMIES TO FURTHER THEIR POLITICAL INTERESTS. SHOOTINGS, KNIFINGS, AND EXTENSIVE PROPERTY DAMAGE WERE WIDELY REPORTED DURING THE RECENT ELECTION AND, WHILE DIFFICULT TO ESTIMATE, IT APPEARS THAT AT LEAST 25 DIED. THE PRESS IS CONTROLLED BY THE GOVERNMENT AND THE RULING APC PARTY, AND OUTSIDE GROUPS LACK EFFECTIVE ACCESS TO THE MEDIA. THE OPPOSITION SLPP PARTY, WHILE NOT OUTLAWED, HAS NOT BEEN PERMITTED TO FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY.

(3) SIERRA LEONE'S GOVERNMENT IS RELATIVELY CORRUPT AND SELF-SEEKING EVEN IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT. NONETHELESS, SOME IN GOVERNMENT ARE TRYING TO RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF THE POOR. THE GOVERNMENT RECENTLY INSTITUTED SOME BELT-TIGHTENING MEASURES IN AN ATTEMPT TO AVERT FURTHER EROSION OF THEIR PARLOUS ECONOMIC POSITION AND TO OBTAIN IMF ASSISTANCE. HOWEVER, THE LEVEL OF CORRUPTION COMBINED WITH THE FRIVOLOUS NATURE OF SOME EXPENDITURES HAVE BEEN SUCH AS TO DIVERT SIGNIFICANT RESOURCES FROM THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE LIVING STANDARDS OF THE POORER ELEMENTS OF THE SOCIETY.

(4) THE GOVERNMENT'S STANCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS HAS BEEN MUTED, AND NOT ARTICULATED AS PUBLIC POLICY. HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS PROBABLY TOOK PLACE DURING THE RECENT ELECTIONS WITH THE TACIT APPROVAL OF GOVERNMENT LEADERS. ALTHOUGH SOME OF THE PERPETRATORS OF THESE ABUSES WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE PROSECUTED, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DECISIONS LEADING TO THESE VIOLATIONS WILL BE BROUGHT TO ACCOUNT.

(5) SIERRA LEONE'S LEADERS ARE SENSITIVE TO OUTSIDE CRITICISMS OF HUMAN RIGHT VIOLATIONS, AND WOULD REGARD AN INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION AS INTERFERENCE IN THEIR INTERNAL AFFAIRS. PRESIDENT STEVENS REACTED VERY NEGA-  
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TIVELY TO AN EDITORIAL IN THE LONDON TIMES ON THE RECENT ELECTIONS, AND ALMOST CANCELLED HIS PLANNED TRIP TO LONDON FOR THE COMMONWEALTH CONFERENCE. ANY CRITICISM OF SIERRA LEONE MUST BE CAREFULLY COMPOSED TO PREVENT A STRONG AND COUNTER-PRODUCTION REACTION.

#### 5. B. ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) THE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS DISCUSSED ABOVE ARE SYMPTOMATIC OF THE FRAILTY OF SIERRA LEONE'S BASIC POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS. RESPECT FOR THE RIGHTS OF THE INDIVIDUAL IS NOT AS FULLY DEVELOPED AS THE CONSTITUTION AND FORMAL LEGAL SYSTEM WOULD SEEM TO IMPLY. TRIBAL RIVALRIES REMAIN STRONG AND ARE EXACERBATED BY THE FACT THAT THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES IN THE COUNTRY ARE TRIBALLY AND REGIONALLY BASED.

US INTERESTS IN SIERRA LEONE ARE MINIMAL, AND OUR LEVERAGE TO AFFECT THE GOVERNMENT'S BEHAVIOR IS CORRESPONDINGLY LIMITED. AFTER A RELATIVELY COOL PERIOD, US RELATIONS WITH SIERRA LEONE HAVE WARMED CONSIDERABLY IN THE PAST TWO YEARS, AND WE RECENTLY RESUMED OUR BILATERAL ASSISTANCE AFTER AN EIGHT YEAR HIATUS. IN ADDITION TO A LARGE AND WELL-RECEIVED PEACE CORPS PROGRAM, WE SUPPLY A LIMITED AMOUNT OF OTHER ASSISTANCE INCLUDING PL-480 FOODSTUFFS.

TO INFLUENCE HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS IN SIERRA LEONE IT WILL BE NECESSARY TO RESORT TO QUIET DIPLOMACY. BY WORKING BEHIND THE SCENES WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO SENSITIZE THE GOSL OVER A PERIOD OF TIME TO OUR SERIOUS CONCERN ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS. THIS IN TURN MAY HAVE A CUMULATIVE EFFECT AND PERSUADE THE SIERRA LEONEANS TO MODIFY SOME  
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OF THEIR ACTIONS. PROMISES TO INCREASE US ASSISTANCE  
COULD HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT, BUT THREATS TO DIMINISH

OUR MINIMAL AID PROGRAM OR REDUCE THE PEACE CORPS  
PRESENCE WOULD ACCOMPLISH LITTLE. LIMITED INTERNATIONAL  
SUPPORT FOR A QUIET APPROACH PROBABLY WOULD BE AVAILABLE.

(2) SIERRA LEONE IS NOT A SECURITY ASSISTANCE RECIPIENT,  
AND THE DEPARTMENT HAS NOT PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED A HUMAN  
RIGHTS REPORT TO WHICH THE COUNTRY MIGHT REACT. THE  
OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT POSITION, HOWEVER, IS AGREEMENT  
WITH INTERNATIONALLY ACCEPTED HUMAN RIGHTS PRINCIPLES.

THERE ARE MANY PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS BOTH IN  
SIERRA LEONE AND OUTSIDE WHO ARE STRONGLY CRITICAL OF  
THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT'S HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD. THESE  
CRITICS HAVE BEEN PARTICULARLY VOCAL DURING THE ELECTIONS,  
ASSEMBLING LONG LISTS OF ALLEGED ABUSES WHICH THEY  
CLAIM WERE INSTIGATED BY THE PRESIDENT AND HIS ASSOCIATES.  
IN THE UNITED STATES MANY DISAFFECTED SIERRA LEONEANS  
HAVE CALLED FOR A FIRM US RESPONSE TO THESE ABUSES.  
THE GOSL LOOKS UPON THESE AS POLITICALLY MOTIVATED  
ATTACKS, AND TO A CERTAIN EXTENT IT IS CORRECT. THERE  
ARE A FEW SELF-EXILED SIERRA LEONEANS LIVING IN THE  
US LEADING THE EFFORT.

(3) THE PUBLIC EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN BY PRIVATE CITIZENS  
AND ORGANIZATIONS MAY HAVE SOME POSITIVE EFFECT ON SIERRA  
LEONE'S HUMAN RIGHTS ATTITUDES. WHILE THE GOVERNMENT  
HAS EXPRESSED DISAPPROVAL OF ITS CRITICS, IT  
IS NOTEWORTHY THAT IN THE RECENT ELECTIONS THE OPPOSITION  
SLPP WAS ALLOWED TO COMPETE AND DID WIN SOME SEATS. IN  
1973 THE SLPP WITHDREW UNDER SEVERE PRESSURE FROM THE  
RULING APC.

(4) A) THE IMPACT OF ANY US ACTIONS ON SIERRA LEONE'S  
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HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD WOULD INITIALLY BE RELATIVELY MINOR.  
THE CUMULATIVE EFFECT OF EXPRESSING OUR CONCERNS OVER  
A PERIOD OF TIME, HOWEVER, MAY YIELD POSITIVE RESULTS.  
AN ABRUPT OR PUBLICIZED APPROACH COULD CAUSE A REACTION  
DIRECTED AT OUR EMBASSY. SIERRA LEONE'S INTERNATIONAL  
PRESENCE IS SMALL, AND ITS ABILITY TO INFLUENCE THE  
DECISIONS OF ITS NEIGHBORS IS RATHER LIMITED. ONE

SIGNIFICANT US INVESTMENT, BETHLEHEM STEEL'S \$30-40  
MILLION RUTILE MINING OPERATION TO GO ON STREAM IN LATE  
1978, MIGHT BE AFFECTED, BUT A MORE LIKELY REACTION WOULD  
BE OUR LOSS OF SIERRA LEONEAN SUPPORT ON ISSUES  
SUCH AS THE KOREA QUESTION.

B) SIERRA LEONE IS NOT INFLUENTIAL IN INTERNATIONAL FORA  
AND RARELY TAKES THE LEAD ON ANY ISSUES. IT MAY ACTUALLY  
SUPPORT CERTAIN US INITIATIVES ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN INTER-  
NATIONAL FORA PROVIDED IT FORESEES POSITIVE TANGIBLE

BENEFITS FROM THE US. CHRISTOPHER

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